

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Drinking water



It is the duty of a democratic govt to fulfil the basic needs of citizens, whereas the condition of drinking water in Dhaka city is beyond description. The city dwellers are suffering much as bad odour and detrimental suspended solids are found in the water, even after boiling it is not possible to drink it, as it is aesthetically not pleasing to the people. Moreover, there is a great possibility of becoming ill at any time having this water. Meanwhile, the High court has directed the govt to take necessary steps to alleviate the sufferings of city dwellers. It proves that the respective authorities are not concerned in this regard as the city corporation is not also carrying out their

responsibilities under proper rules and order. Every day we find news in the electronic and print media that the "pure drinking water" crisis has become the most talked about issue in Dhaka city but the authorities concerned still have not taken any initiative in this regard.

It is a very pathetic scene in a developing country like Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka where the govt has totally failed to ensure pure drinking water for the city-dwellers. I urge the people from all walks of life to raise their voice demanding continuous supply of pure drinking water.

Eng. Md. Meheub Haque
BUET, Dhaka

Suicides

The reports on a 16 year old schoolgirl's suicide stated that "Police strangely claim she committed suicide". Whereas the victim's mother claims that prior to her daughter's death she had identified and accused a 24 year old man (one whose unwanted proposals had been turned down) of pouring kerosene on her, striking a match and then fleeing. Clearly, this was no suicide or eve-teasing.

It makes me wonder if eve-teasing, according to the papers and police is actually a convenient euphemism for harassment. The media calling it 'eve-teasing' significantly lessens the gravity of the situation.

A paper states that harassment or "eve-teasing" is a regular occurrence for women and girls.

Such acts comprise of many dimensions of torture and unlawful activities which are defined as punishable offence under the laws of Bangladesh. Criminal intimidation / threat, abetment of suicide, etc have been identified as punishable offences in the Penal Code and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2003.

The recent High Court Order (2009) against harassment covers all levels of abuse and exploitation which have also not been considered during reporting.

The child protection system in Bangladesh must be strengthened and stringent laws against violence enforced to make sure that this does not ever happen to another single child.

A student, gifted dancer and child of 16, who dreamt big dreams, should never have suffered such a fate. I hope the government takes a firm stand to ensure that justice is done.

Anika Rabbani
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Teasing the young tender-hearted girls is increasing sharply day by day. The outcome is the serial suicide of many innocent girls. Naturally today the parents of the girls are very much worried. They may also suffer from inferiority complex.

Teasing is not anything new in our society. It was present in this country even a few decades ago. It would be very difficult to find out how many girls have committed suicide so far. But with the passage of time, the nature of teasing has changed a lot. The teasers of today are highly "modified" and have equipped themselves with the degree i.e. "MDM"- Masters in Defense Mechanism. To escape, the accused often blames the victim and claims a relation. Often the influential leaders help the accused to save themselves because it would

definitely give them more power in return! Now the question arises how long would it continue? Is there any remedy? Who are responsible for it? I think the whole society and its system are responsible for it. Parents today become very much sentimental if someone tries to rectify their children. The teachers too do not want to take the responsibility of making the young students idealistic. In fact our society wants the brilliant students, not the morally strong students. It is noticeable that in olden days, the teasers were mostly teenagers but today even the mature aged people too "enjoy" teasing. It is nothing but outcome of abnormality. As teasing often leads to death, so there is no difference between teasing and murder. So a teaser must be shown zero-tolerance. Initially, a teaser must be counselled and warned. If still the teaser does not rectify himself, then the responsibility must be given to the law enforcers. The girls too must be aggressive in their attitude towards teasers. They must not remain too soft minded. If necessary special classes must be conducted for them so that they can deal with the situation boldly. If the victims disappear from the earth, it is very difficult to punish the accused.

Pradip Das
Lecturer
BHPI, CRP
Savar, Dhaka

Education

Many things are being written about the importance of improving education in Bangladesh and, as one who has taught in Bangladeshi-run schools for 10 years, as Assistant Teacher, Principal and Headmistress, may I add my two-pennyworth?

Many assume that the answer is more money but millions have been spent on education consultants and major projects but with little impact. A friend of mine was a highly paid education consultant for 30 years and spent 20 of them in Bangladesh. She retired, saying she felt she had not been able to do anything at all! Impeccable research is carried out, reports made and advice given but, time after time, nothing happens.

Do any of your readers remember that excellent project - the English Language Teaching Improvement Project? I used its local district office when I was teaching up on the border. The Bangladeshi woman in charge, a graduate, said she could not wait to go back to university to do research. Let us listen to that woman. She was training and re-training teachers. She told me that when they went back to their schools, most of them sunk without trace. The moment they tried out the new skills they had learnt, cold water was poured all over them - by

whom? By those teachers who considered themselves 'senior' to them! Too often, they told the newly trained, or newly re-trained, teachers that THEY had been teaching for a number of years and THEY had never taught like that! Such is the respect in your culture for 'seniors' that these 'juniors' usually give up any attempt to implement what they have learnt, often at great expense, and revert to 'traditional' teaching methods that fail to motivate the pupils, causing some of them to drop out, especially the boys who tolerate boredom less than girls.

I am not saying that there are not some wonderful older teachers in some schools - teachers who are ready to change and adapt and learn new skills and be a real role-model for younger teachers to follow but far too many seem to think of new teachers (some of whom have had a much better training than their 'seniors') like new recruits in an old-fashioned army - who have to be made to fall into line - their line!

Surely, the only new money needed in education is for the Golden Handshake - an irresistibly large sum of money for

the early retirement of such teachers and a lovely party! You bring in old pupils, have speeches of congratulation and affection, thank them warmly for their wonderful loyalty to the school, say goodbye - and replace them!

Some 'senior' teachers need to be answered when they say, "I have been teaching twenty - or whatever - years," with "No, sir. No, madam. You have not been teaching for twenty years. You have been teaching for ONE year and have repeated that year twenty times!"

Angela Robinson
Gulshan, Dhaka

Rule of law and human rights

The prime minister last Saturday issued a stern warning against extortion and tender manipulations by student activists saying that such acts would no longer be tolerated. The warning came in the wake of media reports of student and youth wings of the ruling party indulging in extortion and tender manipulations in different parts of the country. I salute her for her sincere observation of those who are engaged in such heinous activities

On the flip side of the above episode, police shut down Drik Gallery in the capital just before the start of a photo exhibition on extra judicial killings by the Rapid Action Battalion, saying the exhibition would create unrest. Drik Gallery officials told the media that the gallery was closed, which was set to start the exhibition of photos by Shahidul Alam styled 'Crossfire'. The organisers said a police team entered the premises of Drik Gallery without permission and asked the authorities to cancel the exhibition immediately. But the Drik authorities refused to shut the gallery as the photos on display were symbolic and allegorical. Police could not show any warrant, court order or any executive order, they said. As police barricaded the entrance of the gallery, the organisers opened a street exhibition outside Drik Gallery. Noted Indian writer and human rights activist Mahasweta Devi inaugurated the event.

They are individuals, groups of people or organisations who promote and protect human rights in many different ways and in different capacities, through peaceful and non-violent means. They uncover violations, subject them to public scrutiny and press for those responsible to be accountable. They empower individuals and communities to claim their basic entitlements as human beings. They represent some of the most marginalized civil society groups from the tribal people to the landless rural workers

Gopal Sengupta
McGill University
Canada

No power, no water

There is a power and water crisis across the country. The gas crisis in the city is also acute. The government has to concentrate on solving these problems with a sense of urgency.

Rahad Ahsan
Dept of MKT
JNU

Effects of salinity



About 53% of the coastal areas are affected by salinity. Agricultural land use in these areas is very poor, which is much lower than country's average cropping intensity. Salinity causes unfavourable environment and hydrological situation that restrict the normal crop production throughout the year.

The factors which contribute significantly to the development of saline soil are, tidal flooding during wet season (June-October), direct inundation by saline water, and upward or lateral movement of saline ground water during dry season (November-May). The severity of salinity problem in Bangladesh increases with the desiccation of the soil. It affects crops depending on degree of salinity at the critical stages of growth, which reduces yield and in severe cases total yield is lost. Soil reaction

and women's groups. However, because of their work they face a range of challenges. They are subjected to death threats and torture, persecuted through the use of the judicial system and silenced through the introduction of security laws.

In the recent past, smear campaigns and defamatory tactics have also been used to de-legitimise the works of defenders, with the media often colluding in the dissemination of slanderous accusations and attacks on their personal integrity and political independence. However, we are also now living in a new hostile environment. As countless examples show, a large area in the country is witnessing armed conflicts, often on a massive scale, in which civilian lives and livelihoods are increasingly the principal casualty. It is in such an environment that the work of human rights activists is most needed, yet often least respected. In an atmosphere of tense polarization, their impartiality is called into question.

However, in the present phase of Bangladeshi polity, human rights defenders, social justice movements and development practitioners are more at the receiving end when they take the language and tools of rights into the sphere of economic and social policy. On issues of land, water, forests and mining, our government is hostile to the very concept of economic and social rights as enforceable entitlements. The experiences involved in identifying violations and proposing measures for redress and prevention in these arenas lead us to also view these rights as less enforceable through legal means.

In all the cases of attacks on human rights defenders, there is a broader people's resistance and activists also fight their cases. However, the main point is that the governments have the obligation to protect human rights defenders as a special category.

True, our rights activists have many skills and years of honed experience; there is no mystery or mystique to defending human rights. We all hold the potential of becoming human rights defenders.

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Adopting Bangla Calendar

A very interesting and meaningful article on the subject was published in a local English daily on 31st March. This writer read and appreciated all the articles in it which were meaningful and some instructive. Syed Muazzem Ali's write-up entitled "Bring the Bangla Calendar in Our National Life" was based on logical considerations, maintaining the influence of the rainy season in the annual development program.

More often than not, it cannot be completed before 30 June, the closing day of the financial year as reasoned by the writer in his presentation.

Since the AL is committed to introducing Bangla in all avenues of the country, then it will be in the fitness of things that this parliament adopts the Bangla Calendar for Bangladesh! All that is needed is commitment and determination to have this done. Our next financial year should start from 1st of Boishakh in 2011. The day will fall on 14 April 2011, according to the present Roman calendar. We should set our financial year from 14th April to the next 13th April.

I believe this should help us in formulating our annual development plan and keeping to it, without the usual trend to carry over, since the rainy season invariably delays the development work now between July to June of the financial year.

I am sure people will appreciate this move to change our calendar. It will be an achievement for the government run by the Awami League, and people will remember it for decades to come!

Engr. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Solar battery three wheelers

The advent of the Solar cum Battery 3 wheeler is a cause for joy for Dhakabashis (DS 04 April 2010). At last we have a suitable alternative to the rickshaw. Priced at a moderate Tk 1.2 lakh and consuming solar power (20%) and rechargeable batteries (80%) initially, it is sure to revolutionize urban transport for the masses. With better solar power panels the present percentage is sure to increase rapidly making it even more "green" and cost-effective.

They can replace rickshaws in phases with ex-rickshaw pullers becoming three wheel drivers. All it requires now is official and private sector help to mass produce them with better technology improving performance and reducing costs.

I would suggest that to show their patriotic zeal and in recognition of their inherent role as Public Representatives, all our ministers, MPs, civil

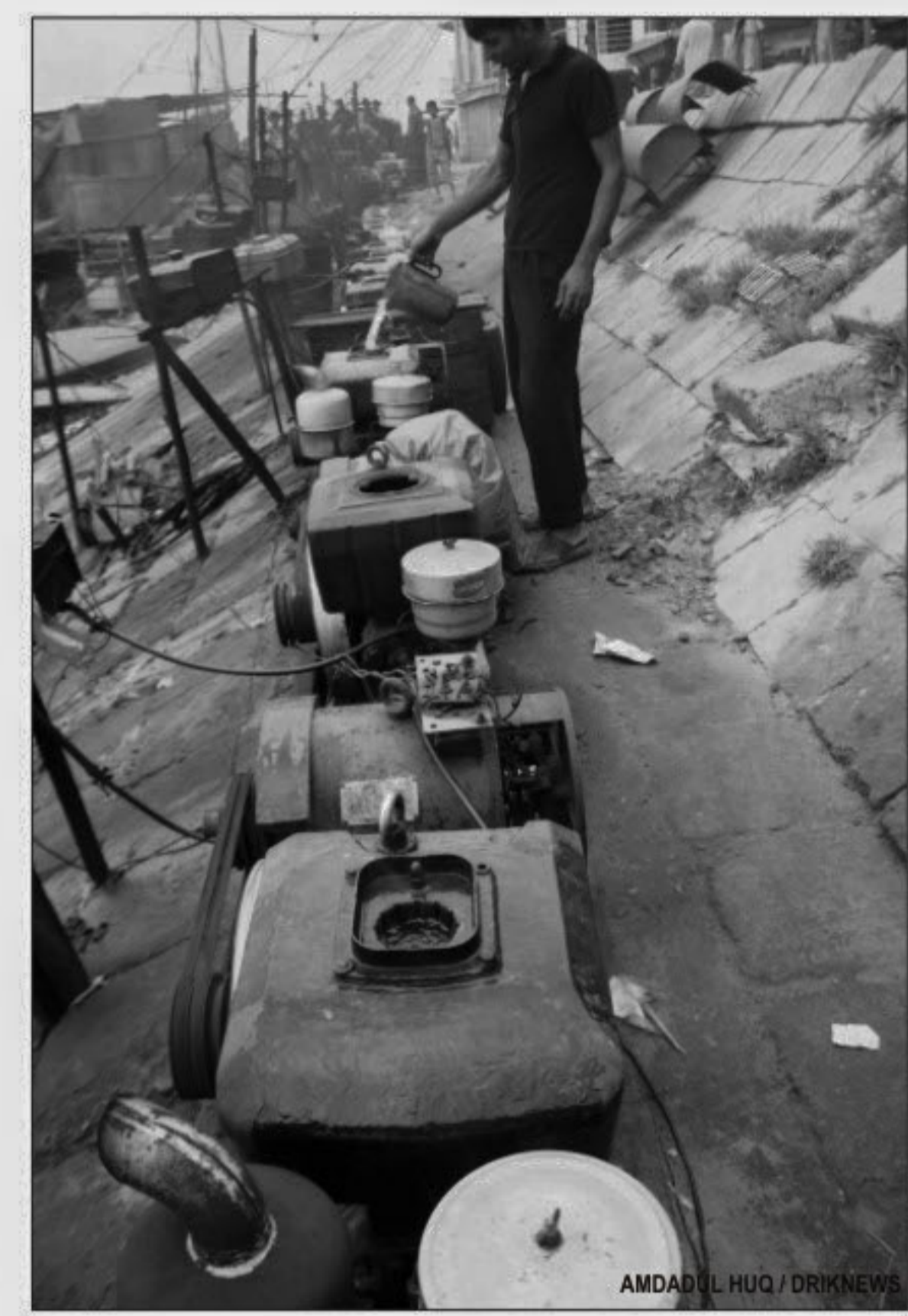
Power crisis

The term "Load shedding" is a familiar one because we have to face it each and every day. I would like to ask all the people who are reading this right now "Is our government taking adequate measures in order to tackle this rolling blackout?" The answer is no.

Our honourable prime minister did pledge us a digital Bangladesh before she came to power. The words "Digital Bangladesh" mean that there wouldn't be any power cuts. The government is making a gigantic investment on its name game, for example, changing Zia Int Airport to Shah Jalal (RA) International Airport.

They could have invested that money in our energy sector.

Quazi Ehsanur Rahman
Shantinagar, Dhaka



Court sanctity trampled

This kind of headline in the country's major English daily like DS which is widely read by interested readers including foreigners reflects the environment prevailing in the Bangladesh courts and the quality of lawyers. The lawyers supporters of a political party are out to save their corrupt leaders resorting to violence in the courtroom instead of going through the judicial process. The question now arises how did they know beforehand that their leader will not get fair justice in the court? Through their unjust violence, the people got to know that the leader is guilty and she is trying to evade judicial process and opted for wrong path of igniting unrest among her blind supporters to save her.

We believe, all cases including those against the leaders of BNP, should follow the normal judicial process. If this cannot be ensured, one day, everyone in Bangladesh including the murderers who have public support will resort to this practice and Bangladesh will be a place of no justice and our courtroom will be places of slogans and shouting. We condemn the lawyers and believe the govt will ensure transparent, fair trial of the case against the BNP leader.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is constantly blaming the BNP for all the miseries people are suffering. She declared that the BNP government did not add one megawatt of power to the national grid and the sky rocketing price of essentials and growing incidents of crimes also manoeuvred by the BNP.

By saying these things the Awami League government is making a blunder because people will look upon them as very incompetent. We think the BNP should clarify their position regarding the power crisis and also about price hike and crimes.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Poor Bangladesh
Bangladesh has become a country ravaged by war or affected by severe natural calamities, scarcity of power, gas and water. In addition, crimes of all sorts are taking place.

All the evidences should be made public so that people including her supporters could see and get satisfied with the verdict.

Our judicial system has already proved its quality by concluding a 35-year old case.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

A suggestion

I would like to give my heart felt thanks to the editor and the organisers of the award presentation ceremony for the outstanding students of O and A levels. My son was one of them getting 10 'A's in his O level. It was indeed a splendid ceremony to attend. But one thing that I felt disappointed about was when the magazine came out naming all the award winners. When you name the award winners in the magazine you do not mention how many 'A's he/she achieved along with his/her ambition and favourite quotation. This is one improvement The Daily Star should definitely work upon; from the next time please do mention the number of grades each student achieved instead of naming only the highest achievers.

Aysha Siddika
South Pirerbagh
Dhaka